An Essay on Hepatitis,

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W. P. H
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By

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of Virginia.

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An Essay &c.

By the term Hepatitis is usually understood an inflammation of the Liver, which is divided into the acute and chronic states. It is not my intention, however, to confine my remarks to the strictly inflammatory condition of that organ, but also to treat of the no less common form of its diseases termed by Dr James Johnson, "hepatic derangements." This truly classical author, after refuting the opinion that hepatitis is unknown in Jamaica, very justly remarks, "many people indeed can not be persuaded that the hepatic functions are atall deranged, unless hepatitis in propria forma be present." & thenasks "is the stomach never disordered except in gastritis?" This laconic question seems to me conclusive, even though the analogy between the functions and

diseases of the two viscera may not be entirely strict. The stomach appears to me to be less frequently affected with inflammation & to have a smaller proportion of its disorders dependant on this cause, but the difference is certainly not such as to preclude all argument from one to the other.

As acute hepatitis is rarely the consequence of other forms of the disease, and as it is usually the commencement of the long train of complaints hereafter to be mentioned, it claims our first attention. Its symptoms in different climates are infinitely varied, but my description shall be confined to such as I have witnessed, or those that are mentioned as occurring within the temperate zones.

A violent attack of this disease rarely comes on without some previous symptoms, which to an experienced eye would indicate the approaching danger. The most common perhaps of these, as may be ascertained by subsequent inquiries of the patient, is a disordered state of the alimentary canal. The cause of this, seems to be a deficiency or vitiation of the bile, which like all other secretions must be suppressed, or greatly al-

tered by the incipient inflammation of its peculiar gland. The altered condition of the bowels generally consists in costiveness, from the want of their accustomed stimulus, & in the faces assuming a clayey consistency, & also an ash colour. This last is not uniform but is of different hues at every evacuation, this being perhaps the most frequent. The former appearance invariably attends an absence of bile, & is very apt to deceive a person not accustomed to such observations — their smoothness & homogeneousness being considered an evidence of complete digestion. The stomach is necessarily affected by such a state of the bowels, & the sympathy of the head is often evinced by a fulness of dull pain, & sometimes by an excruciating headache. Besides these more evident symptoms there sometimes occur occasional severe, but short attacks of pain about the region of the liver. The pain is sometimes higher up towards the axilla & not unfrequently there is an uneasiness or pain at the lower angle of the scapula, or on the very top of the shoulder. After some or all of these premonitory

circumstances, the disease comes on with all its force. The violence of its first attack bears no small resemblance to pleurisy: the same difficulty of breathing, attended by a violent stitch in the side on taking too deep an inspiration. The pulse too if not oppressed, is very active & the power of motion is for a time, almost suspended. The stomach is more frequently affected with nausea & there are sometimes symptoms of colic; but on the whole the diagnosis between pleurisy & the first stage of this disease, on its most violent form, is what I can hardly embody in a description. I am the less solicitous however on this head as the management of each must for the first few hours consist of nearly the same remedies. These though necessarily very powerful, may be soon enumerated, & first, (as it deserves to be) may be mentioned blood-letting. The propriety of this must first be decided on, & I will venture to say that if the disease presented, be genuine acute hepatitis, not only the propriety but the necessity of this first step will very soon be evident to every practitioner who is guided by the symptoms before him. Indeed this fact is so well established, that the blindest devotee of nosology would scarcely be

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and may arise from a different cause than mere hepatic sympathy. Hence, the latter can only be ascertained, by a careful examination of the part or organ which tells more in the advanced, than in the first stage of the disorder, or from the examination of the alvine contents, which is at all times the truest evidence, & thus we are again reduced as our certain criterion of information to that observance of the secretions so often recomanended, the importance of which, has never before been extensively surveyed, or accurately investigated.

Many other quotations from this excellent work, might be very appropriately introduced in support of what has been here advanced, and I acknowledge that it afforded me considerable satisfaction on any first perusal of it after the composition of the principal part of this essay, to find so many coincidences between them. The object of this essay however not being to enlarge, or simplify the present stock of medical knowledge, but merely to give a specimen of my own understanding of medical subjects, I have not pur-

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posely examined the opinions of any author, but have endeavoured to describe in a practical manner, the plan of treating this disease, which the result of my present limited & theoretical information, without much experience, would lead me to adopt.
My apology for its not being more comprehensive & correct, I can not better express than in these few borrowed lines

Ocean's lone caves I would not roam,
In pearly grandeur decked,
Its bosomed treasures from their home,
All glittering to select,
Nor stray to mines of richer ore,
Since from my own, you ask
Its native gems.